United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ In effort to maintain momentum in negotiations on settlement for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Security Council endorses call by Secretary-General and United States President for swift resumption of peace talks in New York.

+ Chairman of Special Commission on Iraqi Disarmament reports incident at Iraqi weapons site west of Baghdad in which Iraqi authorities threatened to shoot down United Nations helicopter if it did not leave area.

+ More Afghans are fleeing their war-torn homeland than returning from exile, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

+ Lieutenant-General Satish Nambiar, Commander of UNPROFOR, to return to service in India; to be replaced by UNIFIL Commander Erik Wahlgren for interim period beginning 3 March.

+ Meeting of donor countries pledging funds for United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia to be held in Phnom Penh tomorrow, according to UNTAC spokesman.

+ Chairman of newly-established United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development urges Commission members to work within true spirit of partnership.

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Concerned that the present opportunity to reach a negotiated settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina should not be allowed to slip, the Security Council today endorsed the call made by the Secretary-General and the United States President Bill Clinton yesterday for a swift resumption of the peace talks.

In a statement read out by its President, Ahmed Snoussi (Morocco), the Council urged the Bosnian leaders to respond quickly and positively to the call and come to New York immediately to resume discussions with a view to the early conclusion of an agreement to end the conflict in the Republic.

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The statement also expressed the Council's full support for the efforts of the Co-Chairmen of the International Steering Committee of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia to bring the talks to a successful conclusion.

In a separate development, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali yesterday told President Clinton that he welcomed Unites States Administration's plan for the possible use of airdrops to reach civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina in critical need of relief supplies.

The Secretary-General had traveled to Washington D.C. at the invitation of President Clinton to discuss the American humanitarian initiative and its coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), which are currently overseeing overland relief efforts.

According to a statement issued at Headquarters last night, agreement was reached between the United Nations and United States that the airdrops would be temporary and supplemental to land convoys. The President stressed his intention to coordinate such operations closely with United Nations relief efforts.

Among other issues discussed at yesterday's meeting were the United States' support for the role of the United Nations, as well as Somalia and Haiti.

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Rolf Ekeus, the Chairman of the Special Commission on Iraqi Disarmament, this morning briefed the Security Council on an incident on Monday at a large weapons site west of Baghdad in which Iraqi authorities threatened to shoot down a United Nations helicopter if it did not leave the area.

Mr. Ekeus informed Council members that the Iraqi action was in violation of this country's obligations under Council resolution 687 (1991) . He said the Iraqi authorities had been notified of the flight the day prior to the mission, and that the helicopter was white-painted with the United Nations insignia.

Speaking to correspondents after his briefing of the Council, Mr. Ekeus said that the inspectors team was looking for items such as mobile launchers or missiles and that, due to the size of the site, helicopter surveillance was needed to support the ground personnel. The day before the mission, the Chief Inspector had informed the Iraqi authorities of the team's intention to use helicopters in support of the inspection. However, the following day, when one helicopter approached the site it was warned that it would be shot down if it flew over the area. The team protested vigorously to the Iraqi authorities, but was told "it was standing military practice".

In a separate development, the Special Commission's Chemical Destruction Group at Muthana State Establishment has announced that it had completed the

destruction in Iraq of all the 122 millimetre rockets filled with the nerve agent sarin that are known to the group. The Commission is currently overseeing destruction of bulk nerve agent by hydrolysis at Muthana. The only sarin that remains to be destroyed now is that which is contained in 16 undrained warheads for the Al-Hussein missiles.

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For the first time since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began assisting Afghan refugees repatriating from neighbouring Pakistan, more Afghans are fleeing their war-torn homeland than returning from exile.

According to a press release issued by the UNHCR, the renewed exodus reflects the uncertain political climate in Afghanistan and continuing hostilities among rival militias. It has also cast doubt on earlier predictions that up to 2 million Afghans will return from exile in 1993. It is the first time the trend has been reversed since the start of the UNHCR-assisted Afghan voluntary repatriation programme in July 1990.

An estimated 75,000 Afghan refugees entered Pakistan over the past six months. In addition, some 500,000 Kabul residents have become internally displaced since hostilities among rival militias erupted in August 1992.

The fall of the Soviet-installed Afghan government in April 1992 triggered one of the largest voluntary repatriation movements ever assisted by the UNHCR. More than 1.5 million Afghans went home from Pakistan and Iran last year.

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Lieutenant-General Satish Nambiar, Commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in former Yugoslavia, has expressed his desire not to renew his contract and to return to service in India, a United Nations spokesman said today.

The spokesman confirmed that Force Commander Nambiar's contract would expire at the end of February and that he would be replaced for an interim period with effect from 3 March by Lieutenant-General Erik Wahlgren from Sweden. Formerly with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Lieutenant-General Wahlgren would command UNPROFOR, whose current mandate is to expire on 31 March.

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A meeting of donor countries pledging funds for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) will be held in Phnom Penh tomorrow, according to a spokesman for UNTAC.

The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cambodia, Yasushi Akashi, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Chairman of the Supreme National Council,

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would participate in the meeting, which would be chaired by Roger Lawrence, Director of Rehabilitation and Economic Affairs of UNTAC.

In a separate development, the spokesman said Prince Sihanouk had paid tribute to the men and women of UNTAC for their work in Cambodia and, more specifically, the casualties suffered by some of them in landmine explosions. He also cited such explosions as the major cause of death and severe injuries among the ranks of Cambodian officers.

According to the spokesman, some 28 civilian and military personnel had died while serving with UNTAC, and a total of 32 UNTAC members had suffered injuries as a result of the hostile action by the various political parties in Cambodia or as a result of mine explosions. On 17 February, he said, five members of UNTAC were injured in a mine blast, some of them seriously.

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The Chairman of newly-established United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, Razali Ismail of Malaysia, has urged Commission members to work within a true spirit of partnership. He has also stressed that transition to sustainable development called for costs and commitments.

Speaking at the opening of the Commission's three-day session at Headquarters today, Mr. Razali said the Commission was not created out of a vacuum but had been assiduously crafted and structured by a major exercise of international cooperation which was the only way to ensure the sustainability of the planet.

The session is being held as a transitional measure to facilitate the work of the Commission's first substantive session which will be convened from 14 to 25 June in New York. The 53-member Commission was formally established by the Economic and Social Council on 12 February on the recommendation of the General Assembly as a follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

The Commission is charged with monitoring the progress in the implementation, by Governments and by the international community, of 'Agenda 21' -- the programme of action adopted by UNCED.

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